

Ten Canoes

Ten Canoes is a 2006 Australian drama film directed by Rolf de Heer and Peter Djigirr and starring Crusoe Kurddal. The title of the film arose from discussions between de Heer and David Gulpilil about a photograph of ten canoeists poling across the Arafura Swamp, taken by anthropologist Donald Thomson^[1] in 1936.^[2] It is the first ever movie entirely filmed in Australian Aboriginal languages. The film is partly in colour and partly in black and white, in docudrama style largely with a narrator explaining the story. The overall format is that of a moral tale.

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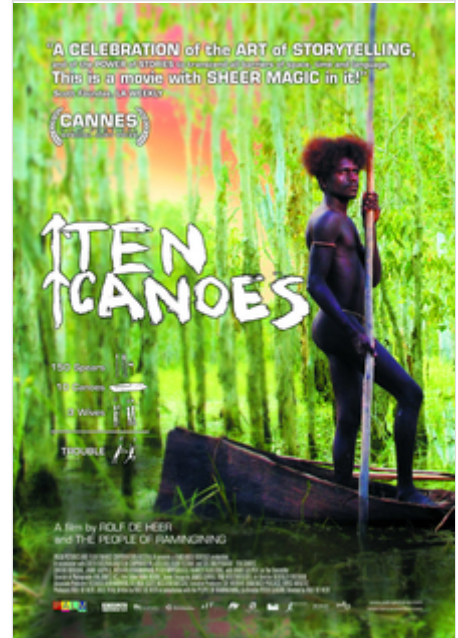
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Synopsis

The film is set in Arnhem Land, in a time separate of Western influence, and tells the story of a group of ten men in a traditional hunting context. The leader of the group, Minygululu, tells the young Dayindi (Jamie Gulpilil) a story about another young man even further back in time who, like Dayindi, coveted his elder brother's youngest wife. The sequences featuring Dayindi and the hunt are in black and white, while shots set in distant past are in colour. All protagonists speak in indigenous languages of the Yolŋu Matha language group, with subtitles. The film is narrated in English by David Gulpilil, although versions of the film without narration, and featuring narration in Yolŋu Matha, are also available.

Ten Canoes



Promotional movie poster for the film

Directed by	 Rolf de Heer <div> Peter Djigirr</div>
Written by	 Rolf de Heer
Produced by	 Rolf de Heer <div> Julie Ryan</div>
Starring	 Jamie Gulpilil
Narrated by	 David Gulpilil
Cinematography	 Ian Jones
Edited by	 Tania Nehme
Distributed by	 Palace Films and Cinemas
Release date	29 June 2006
Running time	92 minutes
Country	 Australia
Languages	 Yolngu Matha <div> English</div>
Budget	A\$2,200,000
Box office	A\$3,511,649

Minygululu tells a story of the great warrior Ridjimiraril, who suspects a visiting stranger of kidnapping his second wife. In a case of mistaken identity, Ridjimiraril kills a member of a neighbouring tribe. To prevent all-out war, tribal laws dictate that the offending tribe allow the offender to be speared from a distance by individuals of the tribe of the slain man. The offender is allowed to be accompanied by a companion, and in this instance he takes his younger brother, Yeeralparil. Whenever one of the two is hit, the spear-throwers will stop, and justice will have been served. Ridjimiraril is hit and mortally wounded but survives long enough to return to his camp, where he is tended to by his eldest wife. When he knows he is dying he performs a ritual dance and once dead his hair is cut and his body is painted to enable the ancestral spirits to guide him to the next world.

The elder brother's kidnapped second wife then finds her way back to the camp. She reveals that she had been kidnapped by a different tribe, much farther away and had taken this long to return. She mourns her lost husband, who had attacked the wrong tribe, though now she and the elder wife take his younger brother as their new husband. The younger brother, who was only interested in the youngest of the three wives, now has to care for all of them, and satisfying their many demands is clearly going to be much more than he wished.

Minygululu tells this story in the hope that Dayindi learns of the added responsibilities of a husband and elder statesman in the tribe, and in the end we see Dayindi withdrawing from his pursuit of Minygululu's young wife.

Cast and crew

The actors and actresses, mostly from Ramingining in East Arnhem Land, speak various dialects of the Yolngu Matha language family. Crusoe Kurddal is from Maningrida and speaks Kuninjku.

Cast

- Crusoe Kurddal – Ridjimiraril
- Jamie Gulpilil – Dayindi/Yeeralparil
- Richard Birrinbirrin – Birrinbirrin
- Peter Minygululu – Minygululu
- Frances Djulibing – Nowalingu
- David Gulpilil – The Storyteller
- Sonia Djarrabalminym – Banalandju
- Cassandra Malangarri Baker – Munandjarra
- Philip Gudthaykudthay – The Sorcerer
- Peter Djigirr – Canoeist/The Victim/Warrior
- Michael Dawu – Canoeist/The Stranger
- Bobby Bunungurr – Canoeist/Uncle
- Johnny Buniyira – Canoeist/Warrior
- Gil Birmingham – Canoeist/Warrior
- Steven Wilinydjanu Maliburr – Canoeist/Warrior

Reception

Ten Canoes won the Un Certain Regard Special Jury Prize at the 2006 Cannes Film Festival.^[3] De Heer rejected claims he is a white director making an Indigenous story: "People talk about, what is a white director doing making an Indigenous story? They're telling the story, largely, and I'm the mechanism by which they can."^[4] *Ten Canoes* was screened at the Sydney Film Festival in June 2006 and was released nationally on 29 June 2006.

In October 2006 *Ten Canoes* was chosen as Australia's official entry into the Best Foreign Language Film category for the 2007 Academy Awards, thus becoming the third Australian film to be considered for the award (following *Floating Life* in 1996 and *La Spagnola* in 2001).

Ten Canoes was nominated for seven Australian Film Institute (AFI) awards, of which it won six. The movie won the awards for Best Picture (Julie Ryan, Rolf de Heer producers), Best Director (Rolf de Heer and Peter Djigirr), Best Screenplay - Original (Rolf de Heer), Best Cinematography (Ian Jones), Best Editing (Tania Nehme), and Best Sound (James Currie, Tom Heuzenroeder, Michael Bakaloff, and Rory McGregor). It was also nominated for Best Production Design (Beverly Freeman).

It won three awards from the Film Critics Circle of Australia: Best Film, Best Editing (Tania Nehme), and Best Cinematography (Ian Jones). (The latter award was a tie with David Williamson's work on *Jindabyne*.) The film was also nominated for Best Director and Best Original Screenplay. *The Balanda and the Bark Canoes*, a documentary that aired on Australian network SBS and which detailed de Heer's experiences making the film, won Best Australian Short Documentary for de Heer, Tania Nehme, and Molly Reynolds. The documentary explores the interplay between cultures in a film project immersing a *balanda* (white man) into the intricacies of kinship systems impacting the casting of the film as well as giving some voice to the inner conflicts of indigenous peoples today caught between the world of their heritage and that of modern life. This aspect has been explored by academic D. Bruno Starrs with regard to the "authentic Aboriginal voice".^[5]

At the end of 2006, the film stood as one of the highest grossing Australian films of that year. By October it had made just over \$3,000,000 from a budget of \$2,200,000.

The film ranked #72 in Empire magazine's "The 100 Best Films of World Cinema" in 2010.^[6]

Locations

- Arafura Swamp, Northern Territory, Australia
- Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, Australia
- Ramingining, Northern Territory, Australia

Awards

Award	Category	Subject	Result
<u>AACTA Awards</u> (2006 AFI Awards)	<u>Best Film</u>	Julie Ryan	Won
		<u>Rolf de Heer</u>	Won
	<u>Best Direction</u>	<u>Rolf de Heer</u>	Won
		Peter Djigirr	Won
	<u>Best Original Screenplay</u>	Rolf de Heer	Won
	<u>Best Cinematography</u>	Ian Jones	Won
	<u>Best Editing</u>	<u>Tania Nehme</u>	Won
	<u>Best Sound</u>	Michael Bakaloff	Won
		James Currie	Won
		Tom Heuzenroeder	Won
		Rory McGregor	Won
	<u>Best Production Design</u>	Beverley Freeman	Nominated
<u>Cannes Film Festival</u>	Un Certain Regard - Special Jury Prize	Rolf de Heer	Won
<u>FCCA Awards</u>	Best Film		Won
		Julie Ryan	Won
	Best Director	Peter Djigirr	Nominated
		Rolf de Heer	Nominated
	Best Original Screenplay		Nominated
	Best Editing	Tania Nehme	Won
	Best Cinematography	Ian Jones	Won
<u>Flanders International Film Festival Ghent</u>	Grand Prix	Peter Djigirr	Won
		Rolf de Heer	Won
<u>Inside Film Awards</u>	Best Feature Film	Julie Ryan	Nominated
		<u>Rolf de Heer</u>	Nominated
	Best Director	<u>Rolf de Heer</u>	Won
		Peter Djigirr	Won
	Best Script	Rolf de Heer	Nominated
	Best Actor	Crusoe Kurddal	Won
	Best Cinematography	Ian Jones	Won
	Best Sound	Michael Bakaloff	Won
		James Currie	Won
		Tom Heuzenroeder	Won
		Rory McGregor	Won
<u>Mar del Plata International Film Festival</u>	Best Film	Rolf de Heer	Nominated
		Peter Djigirr	Nominated

<u>NatFilm Festival</u>	Audience Award		Won
		Rolf de Heer	Won
<u>Satellite Award</u>	<u>Best Foreign Language Film</u>		Nominated

Box office

Ten Canoes grossed A\$3,511,649 at the box office in Australia.^[7]

Twelve Canoes

After *Ten Canoes* sparked worldwide interest in Yolngu culture, a spin-off educational project known as *Twelve Canoes* was born, in collaboration with the people at Ramingining. A website, videos and study guide were created, focussing on twelve key subjects.^{[8][9]} The film of the twelve segments was shown on SBS TV in Australia, and has been available online.^[10]

See also

- Cinema of Australia
- South Australian Film Corporation
- *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner*, a 2001 Canadian film entirely in Inuktitut by Inuit actors, also about an ancestral aboriginal legend also involving the sexual jealousy of brothers.

References

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7. *Film Victoria - Australian Films at the Australian Box Office* (http://film.vic.gov.au/resources/documents/AA4_Aust_Box_office_report.pdf)
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9. "Twelve Canoes" (<https://www.12canoes.com.au/>). *Twelve Canoes*. Retrieved 14 February 2020.
10. "Twelve Canoes" (<https://www.sbs.com.au/programs/video/178710083594/Twelve-Canoes>). *Programs*. 22 June 2019. Retrieved 14 February 2020.

External links

- [Official website at Palace Films \(http://www.palacefilms.com.au/tencanoes/\)](http://www.palacefilms.com.au/tencanoes/)
 - [Ten Canoes \(https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0466399/\)](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0466399/) at IMDb
 - [Ten Canoes \(https://www.allmovie.com/movie/v347436\)](https://www.allmovie.com/movie/v347436) at AllMovie
 - [Ten Canoes at the National Film and Sound Archive \(http://colsearch.nfsa.afc.gov.au/nfsa/search/display/display.w3p;adv=yes;group=;groupequals=;holdingType=;page=0;parentid=;query=Number%3A685545;querytype=;rec=0;resCount=10\)](http://colsearch.nfsa.afc.gov.au/nfsa/search/display/display.w3p;adv=yes;group=;groupequals=;holdingType=;page=0;parentid=;query=Number%3A685545;querytype=;rec=0;resCount=10)
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